

Thank you for allowing me to speak to you today. My name is Stephanie Keiles and I am a math teacher at East Middle School in Plymouth, as well as the mother of four children who have either gone through or are attending Ann Arbor Public Schools. Many of you on this committee know me from my attendance at the Education Reform Workgroup meetings this summer. It's nice to see you again.

Before I start, I'd like to point out that no taxpayer money was used in my testifying here today. My math department colleagues are giving up their planning hours today to cover my classes (very ably, I might add) so that I could be here.

I am here today to urge you to vote against Senate Bill 618, in its current form. I refer you to the Stanford University study showing that 17% of charter schools outperform public schools, 46% do about the same, and 37% perform worse than public schools. Less than one in five excel, and more than one in three perform poorly. And this is the model we want to go to? Is this what's best for Michigan's children?

I would like to share with you a series of email messages between me and a young Teach For America intern at a charter school in Detroit. When I asked her for her permission to use her messages in my testimony, her reply was that she didn't want any student to go through anything like what's going on in her school again, and if this could help, then she was all for it. She did ask that I not use her name, so I have blacked it out and will use a synonym.

I met Sarah when we sat next to each other at an Education Nation taping in Detroit last August. We started chatting about education reform, and she told me that she was about to start her first year as a Teach For America intern at a charter school in Detroit. She was very excited to get going. I told her I would be interested in hearing how her year went, so she gave me her email address and I told her I'd keep in touch. Here's the string of messages:

[See attachment]

I would like to point out that children, and adults, too, learn in one of three ways. Some of us are auditory learners, who need to hear things to learn. Some of us are visual learners, who need to see or read things to learn. And some of us are kinesthetic learners, who need to DO to learn. How are these children learning without manipulatives? These are children who are already in a hole - and this is digging it deeper.

In a 90 minute phone call last Friday, Sarah related to me some more horror stories, like the fact that her administrator has been in her room for a total of about two minutes all year, she has no electronic gradebook or attendance records, she has to pay for all of her own supplies, and most horrifying, she's been refused access to her students' IEPs. We want the best and the brightest to go into teaching, and then we treat them like this? One of the seven first-year TFA interns in her school, a young man from Yale, has already quit. In fact, 15 out of the 100 new TFA members have left, less than two months into the school year.

I want to remind you what the intent was when charter schools were first discussed as a means to improve education. In designating this school as a charter school, the intent was to turn an underperforming Detroit Public School into an innovative, creative example of what a school could be. Instead, the management company that we have entrusted to run this school has failed these students. This school, in my opinion, is an example of educational malpractice. Imagine if we let schools like this pop up all over Michigan, like mushrooms. Do you want to lift the cap so more schools can treat their students, and teachers, like that?

In closing, when you think about your vote on this bill, think of Sarah and her 19 students, and her words: "I would never want any student to go through this again."

[REDACTED]
On Aug 16, 2011 4:34 PM, "Stephanie Keiles" <skfina2@gmail.com> wrote:

Stephanie Keiles <skfina2@gmail.com>

Tue, Sep 27, 2011 at 6:33 PM

To [REDACTED]

Hi [REDACTED]

My apologies for not getting in touch sooner; I've been thinking about you and wondering how your year is going. I'd love to hear about your experience so far!

I know this is last minute, and I'm being a bit presumptuous here, but if you don't have plans for Rosh Hashana, you are welcome to come to Ann Arbor. We do a holiday dinner tomorrow night, and I have extra tickets to services on Thursday. You are welcome to either or both!

Stephanie

[Quoted text hidden]

[REDACTED]
To: Stephanie Keiles <skfina2@gmail.com>

Tue, Sep 27, 2011 at 10:51 PM

Hi!

It's great to hear from you, and thank you so much for the kind invitation! I really appreciate you reaching out and inviting me... it's so thoughtful of you. You're not being presumptuous at all - my dad's family is culturally Jewish, but we aren't practicing. Also, truth be told, I feel like I am drowning in work as a first year teacher, so I don't think I can fit this into my schedule of lesson planning (chaos). It really does mean a lot that you thought of me though, so thank you so much!

My experience so far has been difficult at best. My students are fabulous — they are cooperative and helpful, and although chatty at times, they are very respectful and we are settling into a good classroom culture as far as I can tell. They are definitely behind where they should be, and that is presenting a lot of challenges for me with differentiation. Some of my 2nd graders struggle to write numbers and letters, and often mix up letter sounds and numbers (for instance, 12 and 21), while others are on grade level. I find that those who are behind are often the ones that don't do homework and don't have a lot of parent accountability, so it's difficult to feel like I'm fitting in what I need in the school hours.

To add to the struggle, my school has been incredibly unhelpful in just about every way. As of now, we have no books, no curriculum, no guidance, no supplies, no photocopier. Everything is coming out of pocket and being created from scratch with what few materials I can pull together, so that has been my biggest stress. We are expecting Success for All and Everyday Math soon, so hopefully these problems will work themselves out once we have some materials to work with. I do feel like some of this is just the learning curve of becoming a teacher, and I definitely have a long way to go. Overall, it's been a tough learning experience, and I hope I'm able to give them what they deserve one of these days.

Anyways, sorry to ramble! It really means a lot to have heard from you, so thank you again for your invitation. I hope you have a fantastic holiday, and hope to hear from you soon.

[REDACTED]
[Quoted text hidden]

Stephanie Keiles <skfina2@gmail.com>

Sun, Oct 23, 2011 at 7:47 PM

[REDACTED]
Hi [REDACTED]

I've been meaning to reply to you for so long, but I've been so busy that it's hard to find the time to sit down and actually compose a thoughtful response. I hope things are better for you, and I hope that the conditions in your school

will not turn you off to teaching. It's unfortunate that teachers with little experience are expected to do as much as you do, without necessary resources. I plan to share your account with the Republican state representative who will be visiting my classroom this week, in anticipation of an upcoming vote as to whether to remove the limit on the number of charter schools here in Michigan.

I would really like to get together and hear about your year. Maybe one weekend I can tear you away from your lesson plans to catch a quick meal.

Stephanie

Sent from my iPad

[Quoted text hidden]

Mon, Oct 24, 2011 at 11:08 AM

To: Stephanie Keiles <skina2@gmail.com>

Hi again,

Thanks for your e-mail. Unfortunately, things have not improved much. I am finding it harder and more frustrating to work in this kind of environment. It is terrifying to see the lack of organization here. The teachers are not informed of anything until the last minute, and we are given what little resources we have with literally 0 notice. This morning, I was given a packet of information at 7:40, told to teach it at 8:00, told at 8:15 that we are not going to be teaching that today, and we should have activities planned for our reading block, which (surprise information at the 8:15 announcement) was moved to 2:00 today, instead of the usual 8:00. We have been getting our curriculum slowly, but it has been sent in bits and pieces. For instance, we received Everyday Math, but no manipulatives or homework books that are required for the curriculum. We received Success for All, but the books do not match up with the books we are expected to be teaching to our assigned levels, and we are missing phonics manuals that we need to correctly teach the curriculum.

I was actually hospitalized last weekend due to a bad flare of Crohn's disease, and I am now scheduling follow-ups and procedures, but I am hesitant to take any days off because our school simply moves my students into another teacher's classroom, rather than calling in a substitute (this happened twice, despite plenty of notice to them that I would not be coming in due to hospitalization).

I truly do not know where to go from here. I joined Teach for America because I wanted to make a difference in a classroom, but I am shocked and disgusted by the way our school was allowed to open without resources and plans in place, and I very sincerely believe that the best thing for our students would be to go to another school. It is now almost November, and our official reading curriculum has not begun, we still have no social studies curriculum (although it has "been ordered"), an incomplete math curriculum, and 0 financial support in terms of obtaining the materials we need, such as photocopies or manipulatives.

I have questioned quitting every day, and every single day I feel completely burdened with the responsibility of the future of these students that I adore. I want the best for my students, and I don't want to abandon them at all - they have such promise and they are amazing individuals, but it is now impacting my physical and mental health. I've lost 13 pounds, I'm scraping by financially, and I am not making the kind of difference these students really need. It is heartbreaking to come here because I am passionate about education, and feel that I have been let down by a system, and in turn have let down twenty students.

I apologize for ranting. I am just completely lost and completely overwhelmed by this situation. I think this school is a problem greater than I ever anticipated, and I don't know how to help my students while still maintaining any semblance of myself as a person.

I would love to get together sometime if you are available, or even chat on the phone. I appreciate your thoughts and your willingness to hear me out.

Best,

[Quoted text hidden]

Stephanie Keiles <skina2@gmail.com>

Mon, Oct 24, 2011 at 8:53 PM